



# Catholic Faith, Life & Creed

*A Complete Catechesis for Christian Living*

Doctrinal Catechesis Session  
Mary Birmingham

## REVELATION: Part 1



Saint Peter, 7th century icon  
Saint Catherine's Monastery, Sinai (Egypt) / K. Weitzmann: "Die Ikone"



## Begin with the Sign of the Cross

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

### Opening prayer

Option 1: Use Opening Prayer from the Sunday Liturgy.

Option 2: Use the prayer which is presented below.

### Prayer of Pope Clement XI

Lord, I believe in you: increase my faith.

I trust in you: strengthen my trust.

I love you: let me love you more and more.

I am sorry for my sins: deepen my sorrow.

I worship you as my first beginning.

I long for you as my last end.

I praise you as my constant helper.

And I call you as my loving protector.

I want to do what you ask of me:

In the way you ask, for as long as you ask, because you ask it.

Let me love you, Lord, as my God.

And see myself as I really am: a pilgrim in this world.

A Christian called to respect and love all those lives I touch.



### Note to the Catechist

There may be more material than you can use in a one-hour session. Select and arrange accordingly. Use questions and material that is best suited for your particular group. Catechist leads participants in a small group sharing exercise. Break into small groups. Remind participants to make time for all in the group to respond.



## Read the connecting statement

to draw the line between this week's liturgy and this chosen doctrinal theme.

This connecting statement is found in the *Breaking Open the Word* worksheet for this week.

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Version 2.0 reflects all recent revisions in the Roman Missal.

NIHIL OBSTAT  
Rev. Steven Olds  
Censor Liborum

IMPRIMATUR  
† Most Rev. John Noonan  
Bishop of Orlando

June 27, 2011

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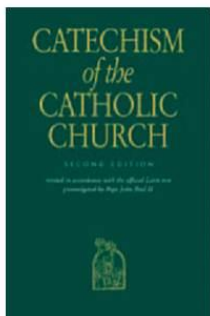
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## Sharing Human Experience

Catechist invites participants to respond to the following questions in small groups. Remind participants to make time for all in the group to respond.

- ▶ If someone were to ask you: “How does God speak to human beings? How do you know God exists?”
- ▶ What would you tell them?
- ▶ How do you know God is real in your own life?



## Sharing Catholic Doctrine

Drawn from the Catechism of the Catholic Church

Catechist continues:

- ▶ The *United States Catholic Catechism for Adults* reminds us that God created us with an intrinsic longing for God.
- ▶ God pursues us and wants us to be in relationship with him.
- ▶ The Catechism described three paths by which we come to know God.

### Three Paths by which We Come to Know God

1. Creation
  2. The human person
  3. Revelation
- ▶ The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* reminds us that Revelation is the greatest and most essential path to God

Catechist invites participants to respond to the following question and for the group to create a working definition of the word revelation.

- ▶ Consider the word *revelation*.
- ▶ Create a working definition of the word *revelation* for your group.
- ▶ What does it mean to you?

- ▶ Before looking at the Bible, we must take a moment to consider what the Church means when it talks about Revelation.
- ▶ What exactly do we mean by Revelation?
  - God reveals himself to us.
  - God does this through sacred Scripture and Tradition.
  - God speaks to human beings and forges a lasting relationship with us.

Catechist invites participants to share in dyads, then surface wider responses. Catechist gives example from his or her own life.

- ▶ Have you ever been aware of God speaking to you?
- ▶ Obviously, God does not whisper in our ears. But God still does speak to us in various ways. In what way does God speak to you?
- ▶ Can you describe an experience of God speaking to your life? (When God speaks to us, God reveals himself to us.)

### Jesus as God's Revelation

- ▶ Before speaking about the way God reveals himself to us both through Scripture and Tradition, we must first address the ultimate, once-and-for-all way God has revealed himself to us.
- ▶ The fullness of God's Revelation to the world is Jesus Christ.
- ▶ When talking about Revelation, it is critical to point out that Jesus revealed and continues to reveal God to us.
- ▶ Jesus revealed God to us through his life, death, and resurrection.
- ▶ Because God wanted to have a relationship with us, God sent his Son Jesus, to walk in our shoes, to be one with the human race.
- ▶ Jesus showed us the face of his Father.
- ▶ Jesus showed us the love the Father has for us.
- ▶ Jesus showed us to what lengths God would go to save his people.
- ▶ Jesus taught his apostles and disciples, and empowered them to go out and preach God's salvation to the entire world.
- ▶ In other words, Jesus' Revelation of God continued on through his apostles and disciples.
- ▶ Thus, Jesus is the ultimate and primary way God has been revealed to human beings.

### God's Revelation Takes Place in Both Scripture and Tradition

- ▶ Just what is Tradition?
- ▶ We use a capital "T" to distinguish it from the small "t" that refers to various traditions people have in their lives, such as the tradition of saying blessing prayers before meals.
- ▶ Capital "T" Tradition refers to something far more powerful.
- ▶ Tradition can be defined as the living transmission of the message of the gospel in the Church.
- ▶ The Church describes Tradition as:

- the oral preaching of the Apostles that continued on after Jesus died,
- the written message of salvation (the Bible) that is preserved and handed on to us and comes to us from the unbroken line of apostles, the bishops of the Catholic Church. This unbroken line is referred to as apostolic succession (apostles and bishops that can be traced back in an unbroken line back to Peter).
- ▶ Important: Catholics believe that the teaching authority of the Church (Tradition) is a primary source of God's Revelation. It is as important as the Bible.
- ▶ Many Protestant Churches understand the Bible alone as the only authority of God's Revelation to humanity.
- ▶ The Catholic Church understands the Bible and Church Tradition as the primary sources of God's Revelation. God speaks to us and reveals himself to us through the sacred Scriptures and through the long tradition of the Church.
- ▶ The teaching authority of the Church is referred to as the magisterium, which is the teaching authority of the pope, speaking in "one voice" with the cardinals, and bishops. The *sensus fidei* (the sense of all the faithful) also contributes to the teaching authority of the body of Christ through the ages.
- ▶ The early Church insisted on the authority of the Tradition.
- ▶ Ultimately, Catholics believe the teaching authority of the Church is a primary way God reveals himself.

## How do we know a teaching is authentic?

- ▶ The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* tells us: "The task of giving an authentic interpretation of the word of God, whether in its written form or in the form of tradition, has been entrusted to the living, teaching office of the Church alone" (CCC, 85).
- ▶ Vincent of Lerins (c. 434) gave three criteria by which to judge the teaching of the Tradition. In other words, the early Church understood three ways to discern whether a teaching of the Church (Tradition) was authentic:
  1. Ecumenicity: Was the teaching believed everywhere? In other words, does this teaching enjoy universal acceptance?
  2. Antiquity: Has this teaching always been believed and accepted? In other words, can this teaching be traced back to our earliest origins?
  3. Consent: Has this teaching been believed and given consent by all the people? In other words, is this teaching embraced by the people?
- ▶ Important distinction: As stated earlier, what sets our understanding of the Bible apart from many of our Protestant brothers and sisters is that we regard Tradition, the teaching authority of the Church, on the same level as sacred Scripture.
- ▶ Many Protestant traditions understand Scripture alone (*sola Scriptura*) as the only authority, the only valid Revelation from God. The Catholic Church teaches, on the other hand, that God reveals himself to us through Scripture and through the Tradition of the Church.



- ▶ Thus, the pastors of the Church help interpret the Scriptures for us.
- ▶ Every week, in parishes all over the world people gather to reflect on the Scriptures in dialogue with approved biblical interpretation of them.
- ▶ Scriptural interpretation comes to us from recognized biblical scholars whose work constitutes part of the teaching authority of the Church. The bishops commission scholars to study the Scriptures and to help us interpret them.
- ▶ Sacred Tradition (the teaching authority of the Church) teaches us about sacred Scripture, but it also speaks the mind and heart of God.
- ▶ The Second Vatican Council document on Revelation, called *Dei Verbum* (word of God), teaches us about how God has revealed himself and his plan of salvation to us.
- ▶ Thus, the Church teaches:
  - Sacred Tradition and sacred Scripture are closely connected; they form one unity. (In other words, they are equally important.)
  - Sacred Scripture is the word of God, written under the inspiration of the divine Spirit.
  - Sacred Tradition takes the word of God entrusted by Christ and the Spirit, given to the apostles, and hands it on to their successors (bishops).
  - Led by the Spirit, the bishops proclaim it, preserve it, explain it, and make it widely known.
  - The Church does not draw its certainty about everything that has been revealed from sacred Scripture alone. The Holy Spirit has revealed it to the Church.
  - Both sacred Tradition and sacred Scripture are to be accepted and venerated with the same sense of loyalty and reverence (*Dei Verbum*, #9).

## Summary

- ▶ God reveals himself to us through sacred Scripture and the Church's Tradition.
- ▶ Before this session becomes simply a discussion about the Bible and how we interpret the Bible, we must always consider it in light of the Bible's ultimate goal.

Participants are invited to respond to the following questions in the wider group.

- ▶ What would you say is the *goal* of the sacred Scriptures?
- ▶ Why should we read the Scriptures?
- ▶ What is in it for us?

Catechist continues:

- If the Bible is God's Revelation to us, and if God desires to be in intimate communion with us, then the goal of the Bible is to have a two-way conversation with us; to allow the sacred words wash over us; to transform us; to change our lives; to challenge us with God's own words, and to remind us of his incredible love for us.

- The Bible calls us to deep and lasting conversion to God in Christ through the Spirit.
- We can learn everything there is to know *about* the Bible, but if we do not allow the Bible to transform us, then the words are simply that, mere words.

Catechist asks the following question, then invites a parishioner to share or gives an example from his or her own life.

- ▶ Have you ever been personally touched by a passage or by a Scripture reading?

Catechist or another parishioner is invited to share a significant Bible passage that had an impact on his or her life. See appendix #1 for an example. Catechist invites participants to share in dyads, then surface wider responses.

## How Do We Know if What We Read Really Is True?

- ▶ Authenticity of the Scriptures was based on corroborating witnesses. There were many witnesses to Jesus' life, his miracles and his mission, but it was up to the Church (Tradition) to determine which books would be included in the canon.
- ▶ What do we mean by canon? (Origin of *canon*: *Kanon*=rule, fixed reference point.)
- ▶ The biblical *canon* refers to a limited and defined group of writings which are accepted as authoritative within the Christian Church.
- ▶ The term *canonical* is used to refer to scriptural writings accepted to be within the canon. The Gospel of Luke is canonical. The Gospel of Thomas is extra-canonical; it is outside the canon of sacred Scriptures.
- ▶ There are 46 books in the Old Testament and 27 books in the New Testament.
  - Old Testament:
    - Pentateuch
      - Genesis
      - Exodus
      - Leviticus
      - Numbers
      - Deuteronomy
    - Historical books
    - Prophets
    - Wisdom literature
  - New Testament:
    - Four gospels
    - Acts of the Apostles
    - Letters from Paul and other apostles and disciples
    - Book of Revelation
- ▶ How did our ancestors in the faith determine what was included in the canon?
- ▶ What criteria were used?
- ▶ The basic principle that determined inclusion was the answer to the question: "What was already authoritative?"

- ▶ St. Irenaeus said the Church does not create the canon. It acknowledges, conserves, and receives canonical Scriptures on the basis of the authority that already exists.
- ▶ Remember the three-fold criteria of Vincent mentioned above? The canons that were chosen already possessed an authority. They were used more universally; they were used everywhere. They could be traced back to antiquity and were regarded as the most authentic. The texts of the approved canons were the texts most embraced by the people.
- ▶ In another session, we will explore how the Church interprets the Scriptures.
- ▶ Part of the formation of Christians is to make reading the Bible a normal part of a disciple's every day existence.
- ▶ The following model is a model given to us by the Church that assists us in that effort. It is called *Lectio Divina*.

Catechist unpacks the following model of reading the Bible that will help participants more fully experience the presence of God manifest in the Scriptures as well as present a model that will help them prepare for the Sunday Liturgy of the Word.

Catechist gives each participant the following handout (reproduced in the handout section below) and chooses a Scripture passage from next Sunday's liturgy to use in the process.

## Spiritual Preparation for the Sunday Liturgy of the Word

### Lectio Divina

- ▶ Since the word is such an integral part of formation in the Catholic Church, the following is a method of reading the Bible that allows the reader encounter it as God's word for the reader. It is an invitation to encounter God through reflection on the word.
- ▶ The following method is an ancient method, *lectio divina*, an ancient practice of meditating on the Scriptures.
- Set aside about 15 minutes each week.
- Before the Sunday liturgy, slowly contemplate on the Scriptures for the coming Sunday (the gospel first, then if time permits the other readings) as a means of communion with God.
- This prayerful reflection will help you prepare to fully encounter the sacramental presence of God in the Sunday proclamation of the Scriptures.
- *Lectio* (means *reading* or *listening*).
  - Sit down in a comfortable, quiet place. Begin with a prayer or a litany that you can recite repeatedly until you become quiet and settled, such as "Lord, have mercy, Christ, have mercy, Lord have mercy."
  - Listen for the still, small quiet voice of God, God quietly touching your heart.



- Be silent before God.
- Slowly, purposefully read each paragraph of the Scripture text. Listen for a word or phrase that God might be quietly speaking to you. What word or phrase touches your heart?
- Meditation
  - Once you have found a word or phrase that speaks to you, ponder it in your heart.
  - Take it in; allow it to wash over you. Allow it to interact with your thoughts and desires.
  - Allow the word or phrase you chose to become God's word for you, a word that touches you in your innermost spiritual being.
- Prayer
  - Enter into conversation with God. Offer every part of yourself, even the part you think God is not interested in, even the parts you do not like about yourself.
  - Give permission for the *word* you have been given to change you, to transform your heart, to touch you at the deepest level of your being.
  - Bring your most painful experiences into the word God has given you.
  - Allow God's healing word to heal you.
- Contemplation
  - Rest in God's presence and God's loving embrace.
  - Be quiet before the God who knows you most and loves you best.
  - Enter into silence, let go of your own words. Just enjoy being in the presence of God.
- Before you leave this prayerful encounter with God, ask God to help you experience his sacramental presence on Sunday when this word is proclaimed again in the eucharistic liturgy.
  - Ask him to more deeply open your eyes and your heart to the Scripture's power to transform you.
  - Ask God to help you more fully enter into the conversation with God and his people.
  - Ask God to show you how to become a better disciple.
  - Ask God to show you what action, change of behavior he is asking you to consider as a result of praying, listening, and reflecting on his word in the liturgy and with others.

Catechist invites participants to respond to the following questions in the wider group.

- ▶ What did we learn today about God's Revelation?
- ▶ What did you learn about the Catholic Church's role in Revelation?
- ▶ What are the implications of Revelation for our lives?



## Community Connections

Catechist invites participants to share how learning about God's Revelation in their lives might influence their lives at this time. See appendix #2. Catechist shares an experience from his or life and invites others to do the same. What is taking place this week in our parish or community that is a reflection of God's presence and revelation in our lives?

Catechist invites participants to respond to the following questions with one other person.

- ▶ What change would you like to make in your life?
- ▶ What behavior or attitude are you willing to change in response to God's Revelation in your life?



## Closing Prayer

Option 1: If this is a catechumenal session, end the session with Intercessions, Doxology ("Glory be to the Father..."), a minor rite—a blessing or minor exorcism, RCIA # 90-97.

AND/OR

### Prayer of Pope Clement XI

Lord, I believe in you: increase my faith.  
I trust in you: strengthen my trust.  
I love you: let me love you more and more.  
I am sorry for my sins: deepen my sorrow.  
I worship you as my first beginning.  
I long for you as my last end.  
I praise you as my constant helper.  
And I call you as my loving protector.  
I want to do what you ask of me:  
In the way you ask, for as long as you ask, because you ask it.  
Let me love you Lord as my God.  
And see myself as I really am: a pilgrim in this world.  
A Christian called to respect and love all those lives I touch.

## Appendix

#1. One evening we were gathered for a communal reconciliation service. The lector proclaimed John 20: The disciples gathered in fear after Calvary. What an appropriate gospel for me on that particular night. My daughter called during the day to tell me that she was in the process of losing a third child to miscarriage. My other daughter was suffering from post-traumatic stress as a result of surviving the 9/11 attacks across the street from her home. One of my sons had just informed us of something terrible that happened to him. And my oldest son was diagnosed with the worst form of schizophrenia. All I could ask was, “Where are you, Lord?” Just like the disciples, I was living in fear.

The disciples were gripped by fear. Jesus did not come and knock; he knew their fear. Perhaps he knew they would not open the door. Yet, he passed right through it. He didn’t even ask them to open it. He knew how paralyzed they were. Nothing was required of them; he understood their fear. I too could not open the door. I was angry with God. Like St. Theresa, I argued, “If this is how you treat your friends, it is no wonder you have so few”! Yet because those words washed over me, softened my hardened heart, I was able to allow God’s desire to break through the pain and touch my wounded heart. A woman came up behind me (just as Jesus walked through the closed door), and simply touched my shoulder. In that touch, I heard the still small voice of God, “You wonder where I am? I am sitting right behind you. I spoke to you tonight in my gospel. I am with you.” The good news is that my daughter did not lose her baby, and we now have two beautiful grandchildren as testimony to God’s incredible, awesome love for us.

I could give a detailed interpretation of John’s Gospel and cite all the wonderful things we know about that gospel, but all that mattered to me that night was that Jesus didn’t even open the door. He passed right through it, and unlocked their hearts and mine.

#2. I recently struggled with doubt, a common problem for Christians. It is a painful condition and I resist it at every turn. Still, it persists. I asked God for a sign, keeping in mind that Jesus told us that those who believe without signs are blessed. Yet still I asked for a sign of God’s action in my life. I have a severely mentally ill son who has no awareness of his illness. By the grace of God, he has been medicine compliant for over a year. This, in itself, is a huge miracle. One day I prayed, “Lord he simply cannot sit at home anymore; please intervene, and help him find gainful employment.” No sooner did I pray those words, from my lips to God’s ears, did God answer.

The next day, my son received word that he was chosen for a full time job in a program designed for the disabled. Miraculous though that was, it was a reminder to me that God wants to be in intimate relationship with me. God wants to reveal himself to me and to my family, and he uses the events of our lives to communicate with us. So often I hear that still, small voice say, “O ye, of little faith!” That wee voice is God revealing God’s self to me in the silences deep within.

## Handout on Revelation (part one)

### Jesus as God's Revelation

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## Summary

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  - ▶ The basic principle that determined inclusion was the answer to the question: “What was already authoritative?”
  - ▶ St. Irenaeus said the Church does not create the canon. It acknowledges, conserves, and receives canonical Scriptures on the basis of the authority that already exists.
  - ▶ Remember the three-fold criteria of Vincent mentioned above? The canons that were chosen already possessed an authority. They were used more universally; they were used everywhere. They could be traced back to antiquity and were regarded as the most authentic. The texts of the approved canons were the texts most embraced by the people.
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  - ▶ The following model is a model given to us by the Church that assists us in that effort. It is called *Lectio Divina*.

### Spiritual Preparation for the Sunday Liturgy of the Word

#### **Lectio Divina**

- ▶ Since the word is such an integral part of formation in the Catholic Church, the following is a method of reading the Bible that allows the reader encounter it as God’s word for the reader. It is an invitation to encounter God through reflection on the word.
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- This prayerful reflection will help you prepare to fully encounter the sacramental presence of God in the Sunday proclamation of the Scriptures.
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  - Sit down in a comfortable, quiet place. Begin with a prayer or a litany that you can recite repeatedly until you become quiet and settled, such as “Lord, have mercy, Christ, have mercy, Lord have mercy.”
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  - Allow the word or phrase you chose to become God’s word for you, a word that touches you in your innermost spiritual being.
- *Prayer*
  - Enter into conversation with God. Offer every part of yourself, even the part you think God is not interested in, even the parts you do not like about yourself.
  - Give permission for the *word* you have been given to change you, to transform your heart, to touch you at the deepest level of your being.
  - Bring your most painful experiences into the word God has given you.
  - Allow God’s healing word to heal you.
- *Contemplation*
  - Rest in God’s presence and God’s loving embrace.
  - Be quiet before the God who knows you most and loves you best.
  - Enter into silence, let go of your own words. Just enjoy being in the presence of God.
- Before you leave this prayerful encounter with God, ask God to help you experience his sacramental presence on Sunday when this word is proclaimed again in the Eucharistic liturgy.
  - Ask him to more deeply open your eyes and your heart to the Scripture’s power to transform you.
  - Ask God to help you more fully enter into the conversation with God and his people.
  - Ask God to show you how to become a better disciple.
  - Ask God to show you what action, change of behavior he is asking you to consider as a result of praying, listening, and reflecting on his word in the liturgy and with others.